

ETOWAH VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 32, 1999

P.O. BOX 1886, CARTERSVILLE, GA 30120, Phone (770) 606-8862

Benham Place

Benham Place, located on Grassdale Road, proved an excellent choice for the Society's June 19, 1999 membership meeting. It is one of many magnificent historical structures that has been added to a growing list of National Register listings in our county. We were indeed fortunate that owner, Laurette Smith, would welcome into her fine home some 60 members and guests.

This was an evening to remember as all in attendance enjoyed dinner on the grounds followed by an excellent presentation by Don Kordecki on the history of the Grand Theater.

The evening, though, belonged to the rich history surrounding Benham place, described so well by Laurette, both at the meeting and in her National Register application as follows.

The earliest reference to the property is in a deed from a David Irwin in 1842. David Irwin is mentioned in *The History of Bartow County* as the first senator



from Cass County (now Bartow) and was one of the lawyers during the removal of the Indians. It states that he lived in Cassville, so it is not known if he maintained a home on the subject property. In Abstract of

(continued on next page)

Salute to Mining

Tour of Homes - Nov. 5, 6, & 7, 1999

Come celebrate the heritage of one of Bartow County's oldest industries as the Etowah Valley Historical Society presents a "Salute to Mining" with an opening night lecture and reception followed by a lovely tour of homes.

The celebration begins at 7:00 p.m., Friday evening, November 5th with a "Salute to Mining" address presented by Mr. Jim Dellinger. This memorable event will be held

(continued on page 7)

Book Fund at \$5,600

Donations have slowed a bit, but we do not intend to quit until our \$10,000 goal is reached. Approximately 70 of our 500 plus members have donated and many thanks for their generosity. New donors to be added to our growing list are: Martha White in memory of Robert M. White, Wayne Rice in memory of S. W. Fulton and Nina Howell Fulton, Jere and Denise Conner, Thomas and Emily Champion. Additional books purchased through the fund can be found inside. Donation/Pledge cards are available by calling the EVHS office.

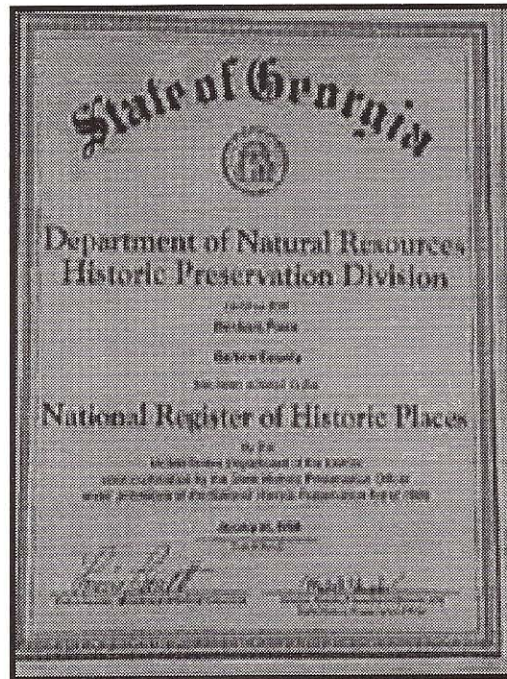
(Benham Place continued)

Deed dated February, 1851 Francis Irwin deeds the same lots and others to Willis Benham. According to legend, Colonel Francis Irwin was an eccentric bachelor who raced horses and had a race track on the property. The house which he sold to Benham was a full two story, with an unusual flat roof from which he could view his horses and the track.

A barn, across the road from the present property but located on the original plantation was said to have been built in 1823 by a Colonel Robert Pettit. The barn was sold and removed to Stone Mountain Craft Village in 1969.

"Major" (honorary title) Willis Benham, at the age of 56, moved to then Cass (now Bartow) County from Laurens County, S. C. with his wife, granddaughter and a number of slaves. His married children, Dr. W. I. Benham and Mrs. Lois Howard and their families, either preceded or followed about that same time.

Willis Benham was born in Connecticut in 1795, the son of a soldier of the Revolutionary War, and moved to Laurens County, S.C., in 1818 where he lived for 32 years before joining other well-to-do planters from that



patriotic and history-minded, and a devout Christian. In the 1860 Census of Cass County, he is listed as a planter, value of Real Estate at \$22,000. His son, Dr. W. I. Benham, graduated from the Medical College of South Carolina at Charleston, practiced medicine and farmed in Cass/Bartow County. He lived on a farm near Euharlee on the Etowah River. Both Benham sites are shown on the "Map Illustration the Atlanta Campaign" issued by the Secretary of War.

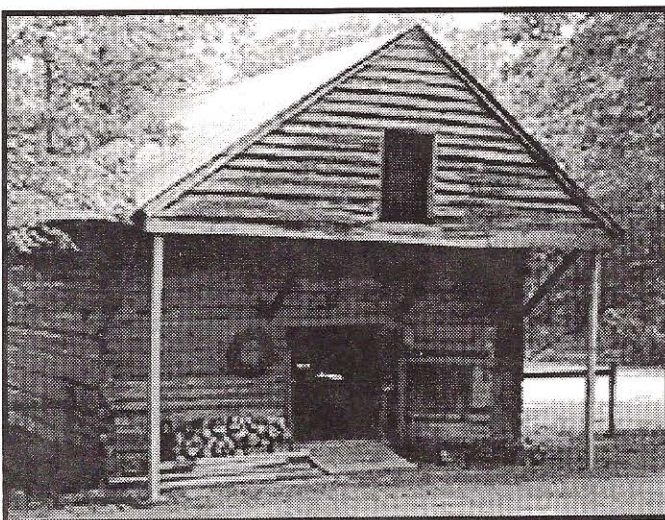
Dr. W. I. Benham served in the Confederate Army in the 16th Georgia Battalion. In 1864, his family and the older Benhams

refugeed to Quitman, Georgia. The story goes that they spent the first night at the Baptist Church in Dallas. One slave was driving the buggy. They spent the second night in Jonesboro and took the train from there to near Quitman. They turned the horse and buggy over to the Confederate Army at Jonesboro. When they got there, Willis Benham was already there and had built a cabin. He had a long beard and "looked like the Lord".

According to family history, when Willis Benham and his family returned after the war, their house had been burned, with the foundation and some of the walls left standing. The smokehouse and some other outbuildings were still standing. Willis rebuilt the house with the help of freedmen, as it stands today. No record exist of other builders or architects. Willis Benham, in a codicil to his will, states that "he built" a house at Fairview (about 2 miles from Benham Place) for his granddaughter, which still stands today in excellent condition. In *Historic Bartow County*, there is a house of similar appearance which is said to have been built by Willis Benham. Family history goes that he built the cabin in Quitman. From this we can surmise that he built at least three other structures other than Benham Place.

Willis Benham swore the Oath of Amnesty to President Andrew Johnson in 1865 (copy exist). He continued to live in the home until his death in 1875. In Tax Records of 1872 and 1873, his property was

(continued on next page)



Corn crib, just south of house.

area in a moved to this section of Georgia. A family sketch from the Georgia Genealogical Society depicts him as a remarkable man who was self-educated, very

(Benham Place continued)

given as 1160 acres and aggregate value of land at \$16,420. In a list of freedmen, 13 men gave Willis Benham as their employer.

The 1870 U. S. Agricultural Census reveals the following interesting facts about the farm in 1869, Improved acres of land - 700; woodland - 550. Live-stock was listed as: 1 horse, 1 mule, 5 milk cows, 12 "other cattle", 6 sheep, and 30 swine. Crops: 500 bushels of spring wheat, 800 bushels of Indian corn, 230 bushels of oats, 4 bushels of peas and beans, 28 bushels of Irish potatoes, 100 bushels of sweet potatoes. No cotton was grown in that year.

At the death of Willis Benham in 1875, the property, then given at 828 acres, was sold by his Executors according to the provisions of the will, at public outcry, excepting 1/4 acre for a graveyard, for \$15,000 to an Augustus Foute. On the same day, November 4, 1875, Augustus Foute sold the property for \$15,005 to Dr. William I. Benham, son of Willis.

The 1880 U. S. Agricultural Census, under the name of William I. Benham, reveals the following facts about the farm. Tilled acres of land, 445, permanent meadows, 30, unimproved, 300. Amount paid in wages, \$1680, for fifty two weeks for Negro labor. Crops were: Indian corn, 1200 bushels, 100 acres; oats, 850 bushels, 42 acres; wheat, 560 bushels, 35 acres; cotton, 55 bales, 100 acres; sorghum, 500 gallons, 4 acres; Irish and sweet potatoes, 25 bushels each; apples, 40 bushels; peaches, 40 bushels. There were 3 milk cows, 12 other cattle, 365 lbs of butter made. There were 28 sheep, 56 lbs. of wool shorn. Swine, 8, poultry, 55. This was a widely diverse system of farming before the days of the single crop cotton.

Dr. W. I. Benham and his family lived on in the home, and at the time of his death in 1905, the property was

divided between his three surviving children, one of whom, Kate Benham Strickland, inherited the house and 160 acres as her share. During the last years of his

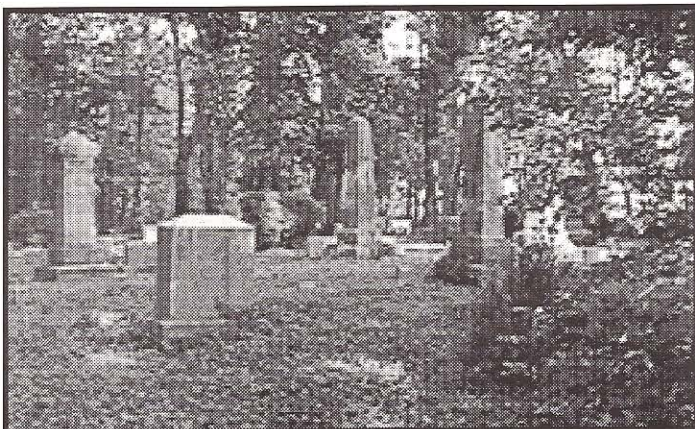


Just a few of those who enjoyed a wonderful evening at Benham Place June 19th.

life, Dr. Benham made his home with his daughter, Elizabeth Lumpkin, in Cartersville. During that time and up to approximately 1919, the house was rented to several families who farmed the land. There were three small houses on the 160 acres remaining with the house, two of which remained in use by sharecroppers or others until the 1950's.

Kate Benham Strickland and her husband, Albert, moved out from Cartersville to Benham Place in 1919 and added the breakfast room, kitchen and well. Although only 3 1/2 miles from Cartersville, the area was definitely considered "country". During this period and under the influence of Kate, many plantings and landscaping features were added to the grounds. Concord grapes, a scuppernong trellis, fig trees, damson plums, apple, peach and pear trees all flourished. There were peacocks and guinea hens on the front lawn. Cotton continued to be the main crop, although Albert Strickland, a merchant, operated a business in town. After Albert's death in 1926, Kate and son, Sydney (the only child), lived on in the old place, with Sydney's daughters, June and Laurette, visiting from time to time. The house was written up in the Garden Section of the Sunday Atlanta Journal in 1930, along with two other old Bartow County homes.

Sydney Strickland, during the depression years, participated in government programs available to farmers at that time. CCC workers planted many pines on the property to the south, and allotted acreage of cotton were planted. June and Laurette Strickland, children



Benham Family Cemetery

(continued on next page)

(Benham Place continued)

in the 1930's remember the two tenant houses as always being occupied by families who worked the land and "sharecropped". Cotton and corn were the main crops. The families drew water for themselves and the mules and cows from a well in the pasture. At that time, cotton was still picked manually and bags brought back from the field at sunset on the wagon. Money was scarce both for the tenants and the occupants of "the big house".

Kate Strickland died in 1945, and Sydney Strickland in 1960, the home and 160 acres of land inherited by daughters June Strickland Brittingham and Laurette Strickland Smith. From 1961 to 1974, the house again went through a rental period, and good tenants carried out much need replastering, painting, wiring and plumbing, under careful and watchful restrictions of the owners. Major restoration projects have never been needed on the house, to the best knowledge of those who know its history. During this period, the land across Grassdale Road which had been part of the Benham Plantation during the nineteenth century was developed into a large sub-division of homes, the "Country Club

Estate". Highway 41 was made into a four-lane highway and increased its traffic load many times.

In 1974, Laurette Smith, Sydney's daughter, and three children returned from Canada to live in the old house, on the death of her husband, David Smith. Since then, she continues to live there. The children are the sixth generation of Benham descendants, from the time of Willis Benham, to live in the home. Of the 160 acres, 66 remains, the rest having been sold and sub-divided into residences. The area to the south of the cemetery is known as "Strickland Heights". One of the sub-divisions is named "Benham Circle". In a division of property between June Strickland Brittingham and Laurette Strickland Smith, the house and 19 acres were allotted to Laurette, the remaining 46 acres owned jointly by the sisters.

No one in the family has ever reported the presence of a ghost; however, rumors surface occasionally that the house is haunted. An old woman is said to sit in a rocking chair on the front lawn, and several people have said they have actually seen heavy chains in the basement used for slaves.

Membership Meeting

AUGUST 21, 1999

It was an unusually cool evening as the Society met on the grounds of the Milam-White home, circa 1860, located on Cassville Road. Approximately fifty members and guests enjoyed the hospitality of owners Vandi and Harry White. The evening began with a catered dinner followed by an excellent talk on the history of the Bell Bomber Plant delivered by EVHS member and Kennesaw State University history professor, Dr. Tom Scott.



Fun & Excitement at Red Top

October 8 & 9

See participants demonstrate pioneer skills such as black smithing, flint knapping, open hearth cooking, woodcarving, quilting, cornhusk weaving and more at Red Top's 1860's log cabin. Free Admission. For more information call 770-975-4226. Times 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

October 15, 16, 22, 23, 29, & 30

Enjoy an evening hayride and gather round the bonfire for some fun Halloween stories with Georgia's best storytellers! Reservations required... call 770-975-0055. Program fee: \$3 Adult (16 & over), \$2 Youth (ages 4-15), ages 3 & under are free. Times 7:30 p.m., 8:00 p.m., 8:30 p.m., & 9.00 p.m.

A Roselawn Museum Benefit Event

Cartersville Magazine is pleased to announce its sponsorship of a reception and book signing celebrating the publication of *Carpet Capital: The Rise of a New South Industry* by authors Randall L. Patton and David B. Parker. This event will take place at Roselawn, Sunday, October 10, 1999 from 2-4 p.m. Admission is free. Proceeds from book sales will benefit the Roselawn Museum. For further information contact Cartersville Magazine at 770-607-2133.

Dues Notices Mailed

Dues notices for the new fiscal year beginning October 1, 1999 have been mailed. Due to the increased cost associated with operating this Society, the Board of Directors has voted to increase dues by \$5. The last increase was in 1993. Our dues categories are: Individual \$20, Family \$25, Club or Organization \$30 and Corporate or Patron \$100 or more (no increase).

The Arp's Golden Wedding

submitted by David B. Parker

In his weekly letters to the Atlanta Constitution, Cartersville resident Charles Henry Smith ("Bill Arp") often remembered the days of his youth, growing up in what was then the frontier town of Lawrenceville, attending the one-room school, helping to run his father's store—and, after returning home from his sophomore year at the University of Georgia, noticing one of his father's customers. Sixteen-year-old Mary Octavia Hutchins, daughter of Nathan Louis Hutchins, a prominent lawyer and prosperous plantation owner, frequently stopped by the store to buy one thing or another, which led Smith to surmise that she had an interest in him as well. "It did not take me long to fall deeply, desperately, devotedly in love," Smith recalled fifty years later, "and my opinion was then and still is that Cupid shot us both at once with the same arrow. A girl of sixteen who has never had a lover is easily captured by a smart, handsome, promising young man, and my wife will tell you that I was all of that and more, too." They were married on March 7, 1849.

The Smiths soon started their family, which came to include ten children and two orphaned nieces. They moved to Rome in 1852; it was there that Charles Henry Smith began writing as "Bill Arp" during the Civil War. In 1876 they moved to a farm in Bartow County, and a dozen years later, when all the children had grown up and left home, to a house on Cartersville's Erwin Street with a huge front yard shaded by huge oaks. (The apartment complex now sits in what was the Smith's front yard.) It was here, at "The Shadows," as their home was known, that nearly three hundred people gathered in March 1899 to honor the couple on their golden anniversary.

The Constitution began its coverage of the celebration a week before the event. A reporter recounted some of the stories Bill Arp had told of his family life—from their earliest days together, to the hardships of the war years, to the "homely philosophy" that had delighted readers of the Constitution and hundreds of other newspapers since 1877—and noted that Arp always "made Mrs. Arp the real heroine of the story." "Therefore, none of the Constitution's readers will be led by the announcement to believe that Mr. and Mrs. Arp are to celebrate their golden wedding for the first time. It was a golden wedding when these two natures were joined together, and they have been celebrating it ever since."

"If all friends and admirers of the Arps conclude to put in an appearance, the town of Cartersville won't hold 'em," said the Constitution as the celebration day approached. Bill Arp

(continued on next page)

himself alluded to the event in his weekly column On Feb. 26: "My folks made me address most of the invitations and there were 500 of them and each one had to be addressed inside and outside and it made me tired to write over a thousand names. When they ordered the 500 I was amazed, for I couldn't imagine we had that many friends who felt interested in our antiquity, but they kept on adding to the list until the pile was exhausted and the postage broke me, and now all that we can say to our friends is that if any have been omitted please to hold up your right hands and come any how. Standing room will



Charles H. Smith alias "Bill Arp"

be free and air and water abundant. The 7th of March will soon be here and our children have determined to gather at the old homestead for the last time and to rejoice with us in the goodness of the Lord. The children are the promoters of this golden wedding and my wife and I are trying to be calm and serene."

Even Mother Nature helped with the festivities. A local reporter noted that a "recent severe freeze" had killed all the flowers in Cartersville, except for those at The Shadows: "Golden jonquils stood erect and fresh, nodding obeisance to the occasion."

The Shadows was filled with three hundred of the Arps' "closest friends" on the afternoon of the celebration. Those who could not attend sent letters or telegrams of congratulations. William Jennings Bryan, four-time presidential candidate (and a quarter century later, prosecuting attorney in the famous Scopes evolution trial in Tennessee), wrote an interesting note to the Smiths: "If the twenty-fifth anniversary is properly called a silver anniversary, then at the rate of 16 to 1, the golden wedding would come at the end of four hundred years of married life. Accept from Mrs. Bryan and myself the wish that you and your help meet may live to celebrate a real golden wedding and enjoy every one of the three hundred and fifty years remaining." (This makes little sense unless one remembers from history classes that Bryan had run for president three years earlier, in 1896, on the platform that silver should be coined at the rate of 16 to 1, compared to gold.)

Others sent gifts, the most notable being a gold cake cutter from Joel Chandler Harris, inscribed "To Bill Arp from Uncle Remus." (One wonders how Octavia felt about gifts like that one, omitting her!)

Newspapers described the celebration as a combination of laughter and tears, as the Smiths looked back on their long lives together. In his *Constitution* for the week of the celebration, Bill Arp recalled courting his future bride, and one imagines that he also told the story that day at The Shadows.

"I remember, oh yes, I remember, how one moonlight night, when we were taking a walk with a party of young people and I had ventured to take her hand in mine as I recited some pretty verses from Goldsmith's 'Hermit,' I said: 'And now, my dear girl, why shouldn't we love each other and mate and marry like the birds.' The gentle pressure of her hand was enough answer and I drew her close to me and kissed her.

She wept with pity and delight,
She blushed with love and virgin shame,
And like the murmur of a dream
I heard her breathe my name.

She half enclosed me in her arms,
She pressed me with a meek embrace,
And bending back her head, looked up
And gazed into my face.

"That is the way that Coleridge won his Genevieve—his bright and beauteous bride—and on that same line did I win mine."

If that story provoked tears, there was plenty of laughter: "Bill Arp made the boast to some friends that he was going



Mrs. Charles H. Smith

to change the order of things, in so much as his wife had been the boss for the past fifty years, he was going to be the boss for the next twenty-five. It is well to remark that this was not said within hearing of Mrs. Arp."

(continued on next page)

(The Arp's Golden Wedding continued)

P. J. Moran, a writer for the Constitution, recorded his parting words with the Smiths. "'Fifty years is a long time,' said Major Smith, 'and the twenty-two years preceding it make it even longer. I was born on June 15, 1826, when the first successful trial of steam was made. In my young days there were no steel pens, no matches, and but very few of the things which we now enjoy. In that time steam has revolutionized the world, run its course, and is now giving way to electricity. The postoffice system has grown to perfection, to be largely pushed aside by the telegraph and telephone.'

"'Has the world grown any better?'

"'I think it has,' said the major.

"'I think it is just the same as it always has been,' was Mrs. Smith's opinion.

"'And there I left them, with the soft glory of the declining sun falling upon the faces, recalling the past, and peacefully awaiting the future.'"

(Salute To Mining continued)

at the 1903 Courthouse followed by a reception hosted by the EVHS Board of Directors. Admission is free.

Tickets for the *Tour of Homes* honoring early mining settlers and homes in Cass/Bartow County will be \$8. The tour will be from 10 to 5 on Saturday, November 6th and from 1 to 5 on Sunday, November 7th. Featured on this tour will be the Cope home located on Cassville Road (now the home of Mr. and Mrs. James Dellinger) and the Granger home on West Main Street (now the home of Dr. and Mrs. Don Evans). Tickets will be available at the 1903 Courthouse on the days of tour.

The Weinman Mineral Museum has already contributed greatly to this event by preparing a special mining display which can be seen in the lobby of the 1903 Courthouse. The EVHS preservation committee, chaired by Jackie Voyles is in charge of this extraordinary event.

29 More Books Purchased From Book Fund

Western & Atlantic Railroad
History of Worth County, Ga. Vol. I
History of Worth County, Ga. Vol. II
History of Washington County, Ga.
History of Fayette County 1821-1971
Pines & Pioneers, A History of Lowndes Co., GA 1825-1900
The History of Decatur County
Henry County, Georgia, The Mother of Counties
Brooks of Honey & Butter, Vol. I (Meriwether Co.)
Brooks of Honey & Butter, Vol. II (Meriwether Co.)
The History of Banks County, Georgia
Carroll County and Her People
History of Walker County
Cemeteries of Taylor County, Ga.
They Tarried in Taylor
Cemeteries of Dodge County, Ga. 1827-1989
Cemeteries of Macon County, Ga. 1836-1994
Georgia County Cemetery Bibliography
Cemeteries of Hart County, Ga.
Walker County Heritage
Pierce M. B. Young, The Warwick of the South
Liberty County, A Pictorial History
History of Pierce Co., Ga. Vol. I
History of Pulaski and Bleckley Co.'s, Ga. 1808-1956 Vol. I
History of Pulaski and Bleckley Co.'s, Ga. 1808-1956 Vol. II
Stiles Family 1895
Thomas County 1865-1900
History of Tift County
There Was A land, A History of Talbot Co., Ga.

Last Call by DDA To Purchase Pavers

The Cartersville Downtown Development Authority is offering "Paver Bricks" for sale until December 31, 1999. Engraved bricks will be placed in the downtown Depot Plaza. Monies raised will be used for downtown enhancements such as decorative lamp post, banners and holiday lights. The cost for engraved bricks are: Individual name... 1 line \$35, 2 lines \$50; Business... 1 or 2 lines \$100. Contact DDA, Paver Project, 3 Wall Street, Cartersville, GA 30120, 770-386-6458.

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of
Mrs. Robert F. Helen Norton and
Mr. Edward Dickey.

Etowah Valley
Historical Society
P.O. Box 1886
Cartersville, Georgia 30120

INSIDE:

Benham Place

Arp's Golden Wedding

Salute To Mining